



Cleaning up the Columbia River

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H.R. ____: THE COLUMBIA RIVER RECOVERY ACT

Background

The Columbia River is the largest river in the Pacific Northwest. It is 1,243 miles long and its drainage basin extends into seven U.S. States and British Columbia, Canada. The River and its tributaries provide significant ecological and economic benefits to the Pacific Northwest and the entire country. Traditionally, the Columbia and its tributaries have been the largest salmon producing river system in the world, with annual returns peaking at 10-16 million fish. The Columbia River was designated an Estuary of National Significance in 1995 and a Large Aquatic Ecosystem by the EPA in 2006. Approximately 8 million people inhabit the Basin and depend on its resources for their health and survival. The 14 hydropower dams in the Columbia Basin provide over 75% of the power for the Northwest. Half of the 7.3 million acres of income producing farm and ranch land in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington are irrigated with the Columbia River; sales from these exceed \$10 billion annually.

The Challenge

The Lower Columbia River Estuary, which stretches 146 miles from the Bonneville Dam to the mouth of the Pacific Ocean, is plagued by habitat loss and degraded with PCBs and chemicals that are detrimental to fish and wildlife, including thirteen species of salmon and steelhead listed under the Endangered Species act as threatened or endangered. Legacy contaminants such as DDT that were banned in the 1970s are still detected in juvenile Chinook salmon. The Middle and Upper Columbia River Basin face similar toxics challenges, including contaminated fish that are consumed in large quantities by tribal populations. Other pesticides and emerging contaminants, such as hormone disruptors from pharmaceutical and personal care products, have been found in the river and the salmon and may impair salmon growth, health, and reproduction. These contaminants are impairing not only the health of fish and wildlife, but the humans who depend on them.

The Solution

Stakeholders in the Columbia Basin have come together in a partnership including two states, public and private entities, and key federal partners. The Lower Columbia River Partnership (LCREP) works to protect the ecosystem and its species, reduce toxic and conventional pollution, and provide information about the River to the public. It has restored 2,600 acres of habitat, opened 41.7 miles of stream habitat, completed toxic and conventional pollutant water quality monitoring, and engaged in innovative public involvement and restoration efforts in the region. The stakeholders have worked with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to complete a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan to guide recovery efforts in the lower basin. EPA has also worked with stakeholders to develop a Toxics Reduction Action Plan to reduce toxics throughout the Basin. While there have been numerous studies and projects for toxics reduction and habitat restoration on the river, it is time for a broader, more comprehensive and better funded effort. Significant progress towards reducing toxics and restoring the river will require a coordinated effort by all levels of government, local stakeholders, and the public.

The Columbia River Recovery Act

This legislation would authorize the EPA to work with LCREP, the States of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Columbia Basin Tribal Governments, local governments, citizen groups, industry, and other federal agencies to develop and implement a collaborative and comprehensive strategy to increase monitoring and reduce pollution in the Basin. Through a new Columbia River Program Team located in EPA's Region 10 Oregon Operations Office, EPA will assist and support the implementation of the Toxics Action and Comprehensive Plans, provide funding and make grants for implementation, promote innovative methodologies and technologies to reduce toxics, coordinate the major functions of the Federal government related to the plans, track progress towards meeting the goals and objectives of the plans, and share this information with the public. The legislation authorizes \$40 million a year for this effort.

- This sustained and comprehensive monitoring and targeted actions will enable significant progress towards restoring the Columbia River. This will help not only fish and wildlife, but people who fish and recreate on the River.
- Restoration projects, toxic monitoring and other activities associated with the restoration effort will create between 700 and 900 jobs a year in the region for biologists, construction workers, and others. It will also enable the river to continue supporting jobs in farming, hydropower, recreation and transportation.